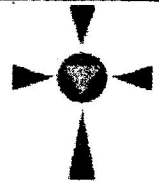


# Affirm!

## TABLE MANNERS



Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Concerns  
GC 2000 Daily Newsletter

May 9, 2000

### Miracle or Mayhem? By Morris Floyd

*Morris is a long-time Affirmation activist, who for many years was one of its co-spokespersons. The opinions expressed in the following article, however, are his own.*

Across the country the day's newspapers report that the United Methodist Church faces "the real potential for schism," in the words of one religion writer. The reports echo the assertions made for a year or more by United Methodist conservatives. Are these predictions true? If they turn out to be true, what would it mean?

General Conference delegates, like United Methodists in general, fall into three main camps on these issues. The first group is a sizable minority who understand that there is no inherent incompatibility between Christian faith and "the practice of homosexuality." Many in this group have experienced in their own lives the reality that loving and faithful same gender relationships can actually enhance the knowledge of God's love and thereby the potential for faithful discipleship, just as do heterosexual relationships. Like the vast majority of United Methodists, these folk have long since rejected biblical literalism on every other subject. They go a step beyond many others by doing so with respect to the half dozen or so passages most often cited as proof texts for the current United Methodist position. They also know that God's spirit moves in her own time and that - absent a miracle - a dramatic reversal in policy is unlikely at this session of the General Conference. Love for the denomination and a fundamental belief that God is leading it to a new place means this group has neither reason nor incentive to initiate schism.

The second group is the largest. They are still seeking the truth on the question of same sex loving. Many think they don't know any Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered [LGBT] people. They are horrified to hear others claiming the name of Christ and preaching

that "God hates fags." They are appalled by the pandemic of violence this rhetoric has inspired from Oregon to Wyoming to Alabama and Virginia, to mention just the best known murders of the last few years. They weep at poignant stories of exclusion told by LGBT Christians. They have already accepted that the bible's apparent prohibition of divorce and of leadership by women in the church, as well as its seeming tolerance of slavery, need further interpretation rather than strict adherence. Still they are not ready to ignore the passages that, literally read, seem to reject same sex love. Many are frustrated that years of debate have failed to produce a lasting resolution, and they may wish their church would move on to weightier, more mission-critical matters. They fear the divided witness to which they think schism would lead, however, and they are unlikely to initiate it, since they are also unsure that full understanding of God's will has been reached.

The third group is another substantial minority. For them, God's word on the subject of homosexuality is fully understood as a resounding "NO!" to same gender love. Some may be troubled by hateful anti-gay rhetoric, but cannot fully disclaim it because they believe that God does indeed hate what they see as a perversion of God's intent for human relationships. For the most part they have reached these conclusions through prayerful study of scripture. They love the United Methodist Church and try to be faithful disciples within it, despite what they regard as an unfortunate tolerance of "liberal" theology and social policy. An official policy reflecting greater openness to homosexuality would give further evidence of the denomination's apostasy. Unlike the other two groups, many in this one are actively promoting division of the denomination. Some are withholding apportionment payments. Others encourage the creation of an "evangelical" annual conference. Still others recommend a process by which "liberal" pastors and congregations could leave the United Methodist Church with pensions and church property intact. "Agreeing to disagree" is not an option.

Those who identify with the first and second groups must seriously consider whether this latter group has got something right. Is it possible that the understandings of God, the Bible, and the nature of the church are so incompatible that separation, if it occurs, might ultimately lead like crucifixion to the resurrection of a more faithful witness, of more love and justice expressed in and through the United Methodist Church?

The denomination has divided before, over the issue of slavery. Then as now the dynamics included conscientious difference of theology and biblical interpretation as well as issues of money and power. When consensus against slavery became possible decades later, the breach was healed. But in the meantime, the division left one part of the church to advocate for an end to slavery and to protect escaped slaves in danger of capture, imprisonment and death.

This analysis does not suggest that the *right* thing to do is to work actively for the division of the United Methodist Church. However the unambiguous witness of Scripture suggests at least one firm conclusion: Working [or voting on issues] primarily to preserve the institution of the United Methodist Church as we know it would be a mistake. The danger is not so much the shrill cries that any given action will "tear the church apart." It is easy to recognize these threatening appeals to maintain existing structures of power and influence. More serious dangers lie in subtle urgings from entrenched institutional interests. Often they are couched in terms of mission and ministry appealing to those who consider themselves progressive. Absent the unexpected -- a miracle! -- delegates should seek to discern what paths might in fact constitute the real mayhem for the church of Jesus Christ.

## **I Am a person of sacred worth**

*Nester Gerente was a member of the Multigrain Gathering out of which grew United Methodist of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church. His commitment to justice is exemplified by his work with Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, and anti-death penalty education. Nester served as president of the United Methodist Adult Fellowship of the Philippines, and currently is a religious worker at Trinity UMC in Kansas City, MO. The following is the speech that Nester made at the RCP Rally last Saturday.*

Who am I to speak to you today? I do not have impressive credentials or rich experiences to speak of. Who am I to address this crowd of heroes and sheroes of the Church. Well, I want to offer an answer to my own question. **I am a person of sacred worth.** That's what the Bible and the Book of Discipline declares. But to a Gay man like me, this is mere rhetoric. The Church through its overt and subtle ways makes me feel less valuable than heterosexuals. Countless church members who act and talk as if they have the monopoly of scriptural truth are saying that a person like me is an aberration of who needs to transform.

It was the early part of 1990 when I participated in "Spiritual Warfare." I don't know how many of you are familiar with this. Proponents of this spiritual healing are convinced that we Christians are faced with constant battles against demonic spirits. We commit sins because certain evil spirits are living within us. According to them, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered persons have the indwelling of the spirit of Sodom.

I was so desperate for help and healing so I asked a non-Methodist pastor to pray over me to drive away the sodomic forces. For a month or so thereafter, it appeared as if I had been "healed" but only to discover that once again I had forced myself into denial. Instead of being positive and whole, I became depressed, anxious, guilt-ridden and hated myself all the more. This is exactly why the American Psychiatric Association is firmly opposed to reparative or conversion therapy. In their statement dated December 1998, they rebuked those therapists who prescribe that patient, change his/her gender orientation. The Association also refutes those practitioners who still regard homosexuality as a mental disorder. The potential risks of this treatment such as depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior are the very same things I experienced through spiritual therapy.

So for those espousing transformation and wanting me to reshape, I tell you be cautious. Do not limit yourselves to the wisdom of scripture alone, but try to listen to us, consider our many useless attempts to conform to the norms of heterosexuality. Many believe sexual orientation is a matter of personal choice. In a sense, that's somewhat true. It certainly applies to many Gays would opt to live a straight lifestyle in order to be accepted, respected, hired or even ordained, but later

found it necessary to disclose their real sexual orientation. Of course, this is also factual for those born straight who choose to commit homosexual acts. And I think that this is what the Bible in Leviticus is talking about and strongly against. What is involved here is a relationship of lust and subjugation. For these people, the idea of loving, monogamous and committed relationships between same gender couples is beyond comprehension. Hence brothers and sisters in Christ, **gayness is definitely not an option for me -- It is my being.** It is a gift that took me 33 years to finally receive. It took me three decades to ultimately pick up the broken pieces of my true image, the image that I too am created in God's likeness.

I call on the United Methodist Church to be consistent with your pronouncements. I have been proud of you when you were humble enough to admit that your knowledge of human sexuality is limited, but I became confused and betrayed when you arrogantly declare that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. One thing is sure my cherished Church, I will not be silenced by your spiritual harassment. I will continue to be a voice for full inclusion. I will still dedicate my life to your ministries even in the periphery. For in the end, I know I am the only one eventually accountable for my life to the One who created me Gay as I am. Let us quit debating. The time to act decisively is **NOW**. You have two options, my dear Church, you either exclude us or fully extend the table of God's grace and love.

**May the God of inclusion be with us all.**

## **Danger, Danger, Danger Will Robinson....**

### **American Psychiatric Association's Statement on Reparative Therapy**

On December 12, 1998, The American Psychiatric Association Board of Trustees (by unanimous vote) declared in a position statement that **"the potential risks of 'reparative therapy' are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior.** Therefore, the **APA opposes any such psychiatric treatment which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality *per se* is a mental disorder or based upon the *a priori* assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation."**

It is obvious that therapies designed to change sexual orientation have no basis in medical practice. We suggest that all **victims of the violent practice of reparative therapies consult a civil attorney immediately and press for malpractice litigation in civil court against the perpetrators, including clergy.** Further, we recommend that any clergy person involved in this bogus business be named in such litigation and receive subpoena to testify in court cases. This is abusive, terroristic and an assault upon Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered persons. Therapies attempting to change sexual orientation have no place in our twenty-first century and will be relegated to history's garbage dump, along with such therapeutic assaults practiced by physicians at the Nuremberg trials.

The Church's treatment of its Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered children is appalling at best. Ceremonies of repentance and reconciliation for the Church's complicity in reparative therapies is certainly in the Church's future. Affirmation will never, never, never allow the Church to forget its role in such harmful activity. Our memory is large, and we will report clergy involved in this process to their bishops.

## **No Hurting Buckaroo**

If God is saying S/He can do nothing about starving children in the Sudan, but has time and energy to make Gay people straight, then God must be one hurting buckaroo. [*Hartford Au Courant*].

## **Silenced Witnesses**

The Silenced Witnesses Project is an exposition personalizing those who have been killed by acts of violence towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered community or those who committed suicide. This exhibit will be shown throughout General Conference at different locations and times. From now until the end of General Conference we'll list each day several names from the ***Silenced Witnesses*** display.

**David Perea Jr.**  
Bisexual, New Mexico.

Ryan S. Davis killed Perea with a shotgun while Perea was watching TV in his apartment. Davis

did not know Perea. Davis murdered Perea because he was a "faggot."

**Harold McCormick**

African-American Civil rights activist.

McCormick was strangled in his home by Willie Arthur Brown, Detroit. Brown was convicted November, 1999.

"Hate is learned. It can be unlearned. Educators can play a vital role in preventing the development of the prejudice and stereotyping that leads to hate and leads to crime," said Janet Reno, US Attorney General, October 9, 1999.

**Eddie Matthews**

African-American, Gay.

Strangled in his home in Detroit, Michigan, probably by Willie Arthur Brown.

The United Methodist Church has repudiated verbal and physical violence and the denial of civil rights done in the name of Christ. By itself, however, that is not nearly enough. To be honest, we must either delete the language that destroys hope and life or be very clear that as a church we speak and act to encourage harassment, violence and suicide.

**Jamie Ray Tolbert**

24, Biloxi, Mississippi.

Tolbert was brutally beaten to death on January 1, 2000

Suspects: Brent David Kabat, 19 and Jeremy Shawn Bentley, 22. "He [Tolbert] was real nice and sweet and would do just about anything for anybody.

**Michele Abdil**

and

**Roxanne Ellis**

United Methodists, active members of Ashland UMC, Oregon, and lesbian activists.

Abdil and Ellis were kidnapped, bound and shot, December 4, 1995, by Robert Acremant. Said Acremant, "Lezzie grandmothers. It made me sick to my stomach."

**TO THE CHAIR, FROM THE VOICELESS**

Why?

Why oh God do you call us to sit here  
listening to people

rip the heart out of our lives

as though we don't exist

in this very

in this very

in this very

room?

How

do we see this work as holy

when it desecrates

our lives?

I recall

Japanese patriots

herded into camps

from which they volunteered

for service to the nation

that denigrated

their lives.

So, can we continue

to volunteer for service,

to answer your call,

to stand in this place,

not even a target,

because you see

a target.

Jeanne G. Knepper

June 13, 1997